TEXT BOOKS OF ORNAMENTAL DESIGN.

THE PLANNING OF ORNAMENT.

BY

LEWIS F. DAY,

AUTHOR OF 'SOME PRINCIPLES OF EVERY-DAY ART,' 'THE ANATOMY OF PATTERN,' 'THE APPLICATION OF ORNAMENT,' ETC.

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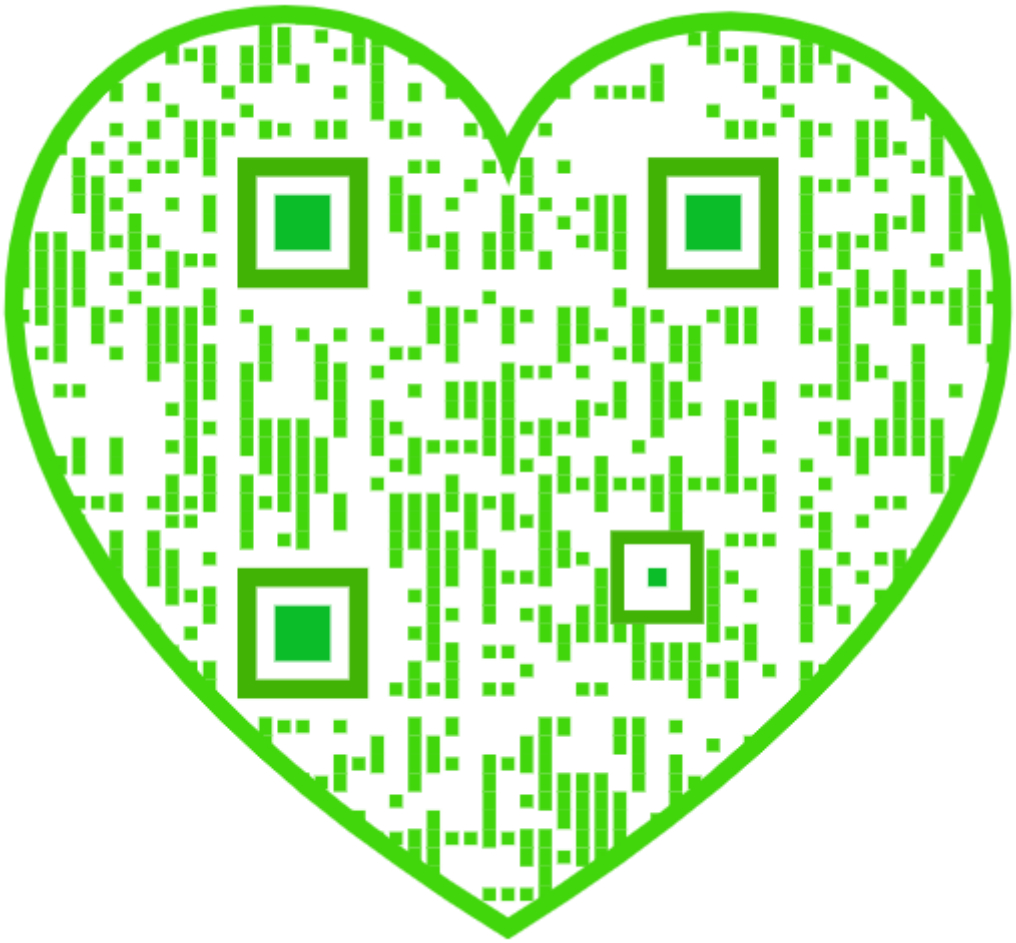

MR

PREFACE.

THE second of a series of Text Books stands scarcely in need of preface. The aim and scope, as well as the origin, of this series were duly set forth in 'The Anatomy of Pattern.' What was there said applies for the most part to the present volume.

A new edition gives me the opportunity of revising both the text and illustrations, and of adding some new plates.

It is encouraging to find that the demand for the Text Books is not exhausted with the first issue, and that they appear to be fulfilling the purpose I had in view in undertaking them.

LEWIS F. DAY.

13, *Mecklenburg Square, London, W.C.*
September 21st, 1890.

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THE

PLANNING OF ORNAMENT.

I.

INTRODUCTORY.

"The Anatomy of Pattern" concerned itself with the lines on which repeated pattern is built. It is proposed in this second text-book of the series to discuss the order in which ornament not necessarily recurring may be distributed. And it will not be difficult to show that, illimitable as those lines may at first sight appear to be, they too allow themselves to be classed pretty definitely; and, moreover, that the classes are not by any means so numerous as might be supposed.

The first step in design, or rather the preliminary to all design, is to determine the lines on which it shall be distributed—to plan it, that is to say.

The more clearly the designer realises to himself the lines on which it is open to him to

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proceed, the better; and if it can be shown (as it can) that these are, comparatively speaking, few and simple, so much the easier will it be for him to make up his mind promptly and determinedly which of them he will in any given case adopt.

The shape of the actual space to be filled will oftentimes determine for him, more or less, the distribution of his design. That is to say, it may very likely render certain schemes altogether unavailable, and perhaps even limit his choice to a single plan; but at his very freest a man is limited, in the nature of things, to certain methods of procedure presently to be defined.

Plainly it would be out of the question to discuss at length the relation of every possible plan to every possible shape. I purpose, therefore, to take the simple parallelogram (which may stand for panel, page, floor, ceiling, carpet, curtain, wall, window, door, façade, no matter what), and to show the possibilities with regard to the distribution of ornament over its surface. It will then remain only to explain how the same principles apply, whatever the shape to be filled.

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II.

The Use of the Border.

Given a panel to be filled, how is this to be done?

There are two very obvious ways of going to work, either of which, to the sophisticated modern at all events, seems equally natural. You may start as well from the centre as from the edge of it. That is to say, you may boldly attack the centre and let your design spread outwards to the margin; or you may begin with a border and creep cautiously inwards.

When once the border is defined, the space within remains to be treated. Theoretically, indeed, you have only reduced the area over which your composition is to be distributed. But practically that is not quite so; more especially if the border be of any importance For a border may be of such interest that nothing further is needed, and the centre of the panel is best undisturbed by ornament. Especially may this be so if the material in

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use be in itself of some intrinsic interest. It is distinctly not desirable to mar the surface of beautiful wood or richly varied marble with added ornament. And, for example, with the cabinet maker it resolves itself pretty generally (unless he should once in a while mean to indulge in ultra lavish enrichment), into a question of whether he shall enrich his panels or the mouldings bordering them.

The proportion of a border is of more importance to a scheme of design than might be supposed. It makes all the difference whether it is simple or elaborate in character. A very deep rich border has such an entirely different effect from a moderately simple one, that it looks something like a different treatment altogether. Compare Plates 2, 3, and 4, and see what a different part the border plays in each. The ornament on Plate 2 might appropriately enrich a page of text: that on Plate 4 requires obviously some more substantial filling. The strength of the border goes for something as well as its depth.

Borders may easily be so schemed (and should be so schemed) as to give panels of proportions calculated to allow of the decoration proposed for them. If, for instance, a

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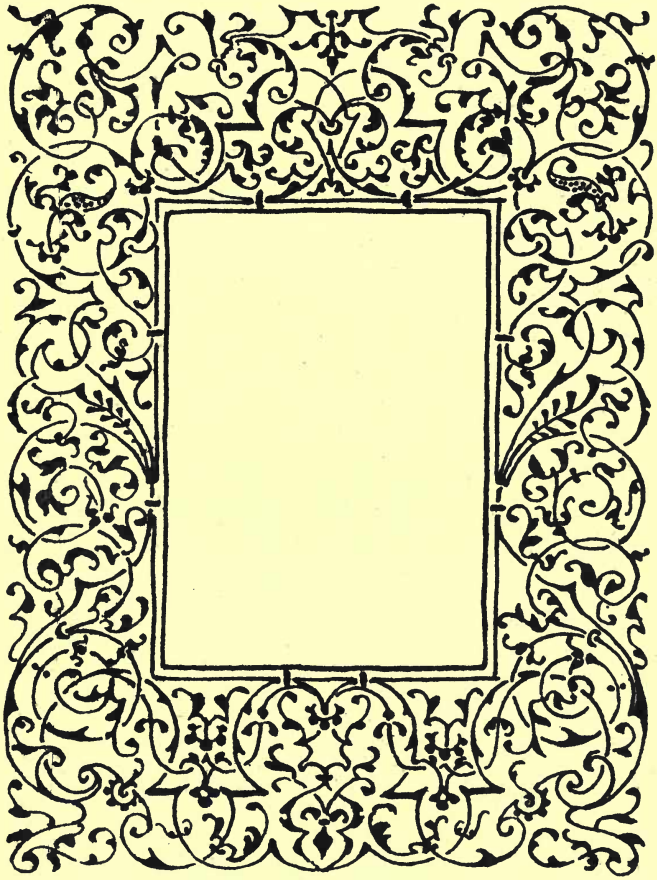
Plate 2.



C. F. KELL PHOTO-LITHO. 8. FURNIVAL ST HOLBORN E.C.

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Plate 3

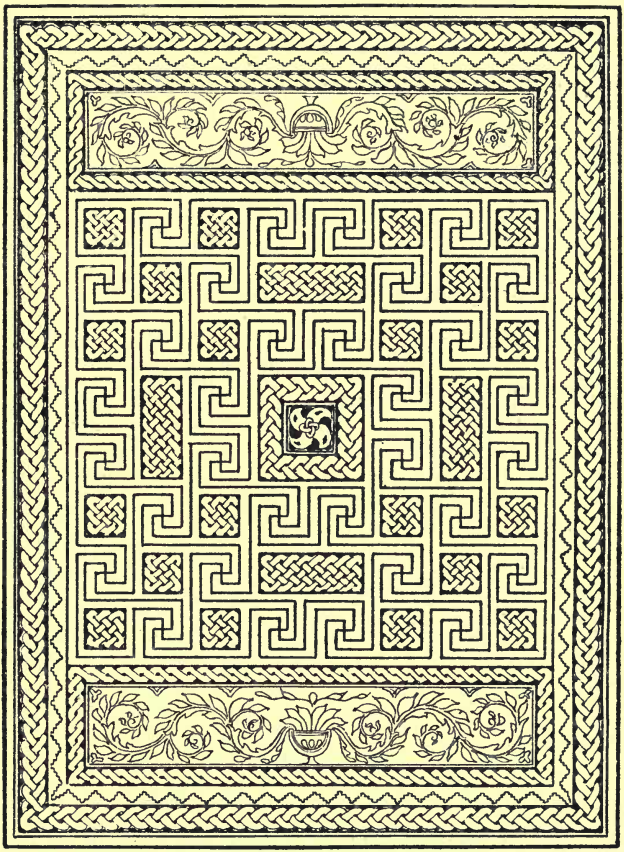

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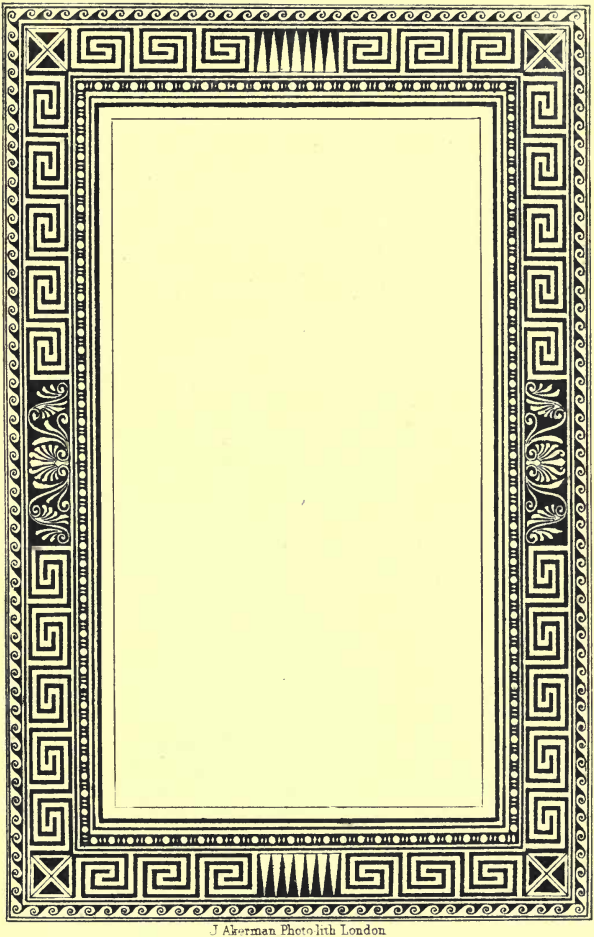
Plate 4.



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panel is to be filled with a diaper, arrangement should be made for the "repeat" of the pattern within it. It is quite clear that the Arab diaper spread over the panels in Plate 5 was devised expressly with that object. Again in Plate 6 the necessity of accommodating one's ornament to shapes so unequal as the panels of the door, has obviously to a considerable extent controlled the design. But for those small upper panels, it would never have occurred to one to break up the longer panels just so.

Panels or other spaces which are to contain figures or figure subjects should be of a proportion and size not too difficult to occupy in that way.

In the case of an isolated panel, this is perhaps of less importance—the artist ought to be equal to the occasion—but in the case of a series of panels to be treated in accord, the problem is made infinitely more difficult when they are of all manner of shapes and sizes.

It is no easy matter to scheme even the simplest ornament into panels of such awkward and widely different shapes and sizes as the decorator has only too frequently to deal with.

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There is a salon in the palace at Fontainebleau in which the proportions of the panelling prove to be due almost entirely to the *painter*, who has brought the larger panels into scale with the smaller by means of a series of borders within the actual mouldings. It is much less trouble, of course, for the joiner, when he has an awkward space to panel, to determine the width of the stiles, and let the panels come as they may. But a very little consideration on his part would save the decorator, who comes after him, an infinity of pains. And though it may be the business of the decorator to get over difficulties of the sort, his work is not so easy that there is any occasion to put difficulties in his way.

The stiles which frame a panel may be considered as its border; the mouldings again, are so many borders within borders.

A border which is made up of many lines really constitutes a series of borders one within the other. The use of border within border as a deliberate scheme of ornament is common enough, as was the case in certain tooled bookbindings of the seventeenth century, one of which is represented on Plate 7.

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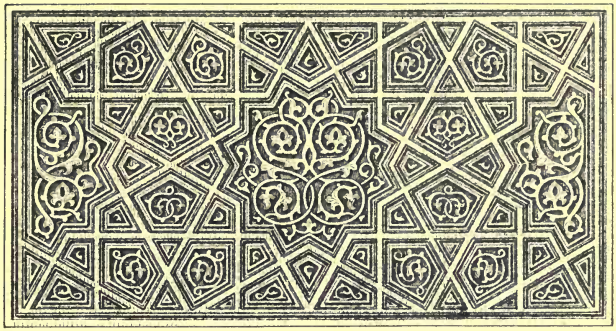
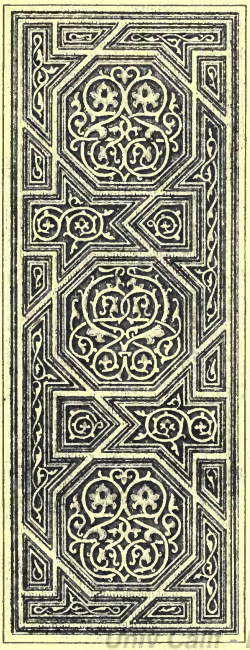
Plate 5.





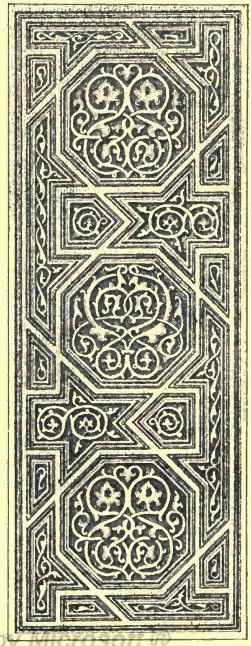


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Plate 6

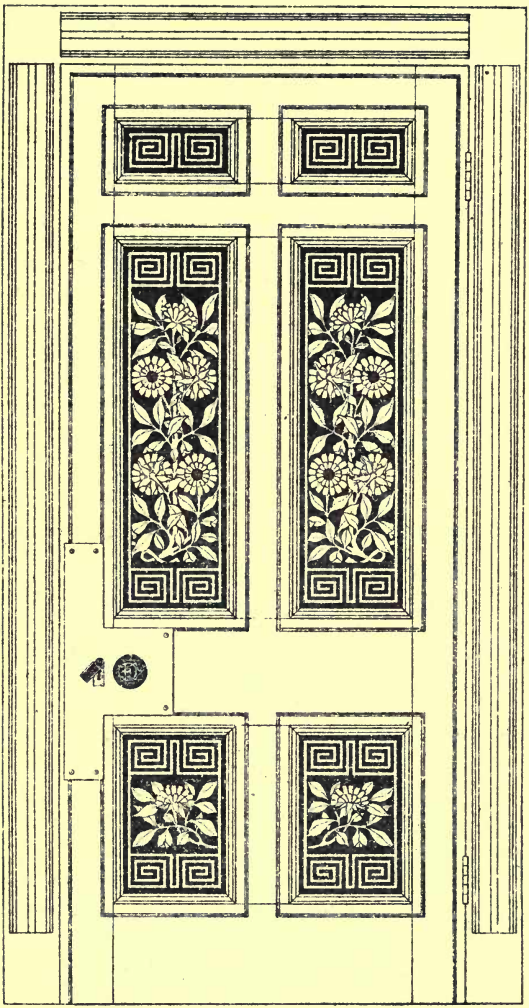

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Plate 7.

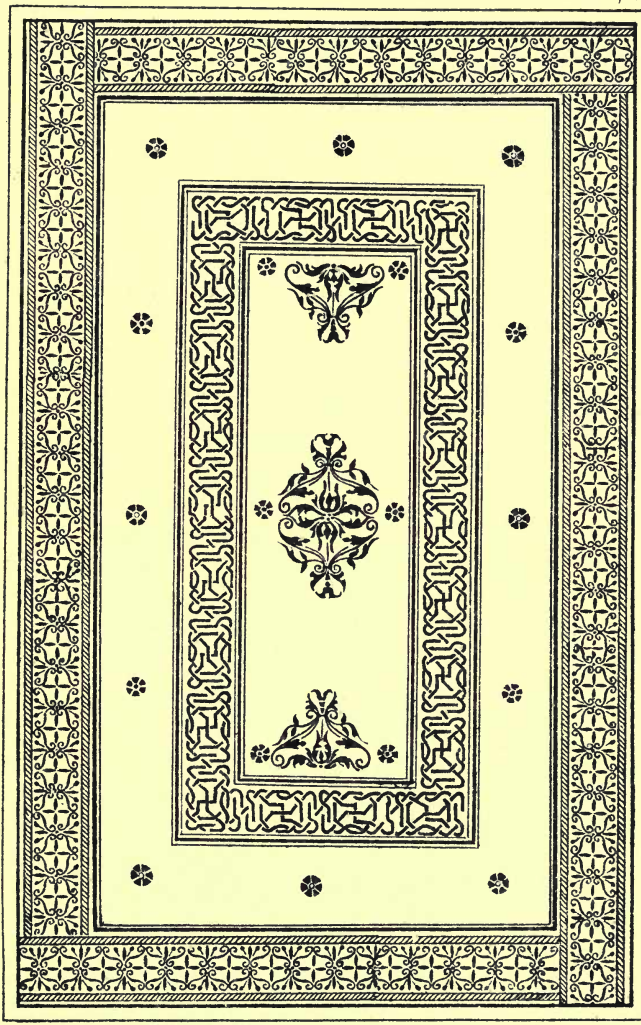

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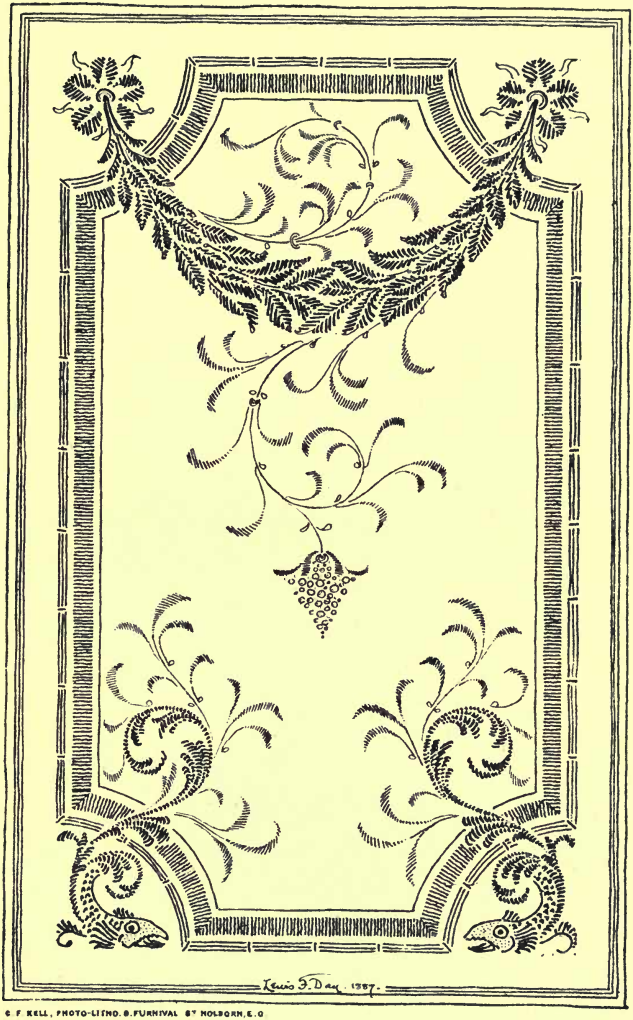
Plate 8.



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You may even add border to border (as was sometimes done) until the whole field is occupied. It is not altogether uncommon in Renaissance cabinet-work to find the panel encroached upon by border after border of mouldings until it dwindles practically to nothing.

The obvious and simple thing to do with a border is to keep it of one uniform and equal width. But such equality of width is by no means essential. You may see in mediæval illuminations the effect, more or less satisfactory, of emphasising two sides of the page. Nor need the border necessarily be continued all round the space at all. Curtains have often a border on two sides only, and sometimes only on one, marking what one may call the lips of the hangings. You may look upon the architrave of a door as a border on three sides of it only. And in the same way a mantelpiece partly frames the fire-grate, the fender completing the scheme. A certain reasonableness is the most complete justification of such partial bordering.

Every frame is a border. No matter how irregular the shape of it may be, a frame's a frame "for a' that." It may take the architectural form of cornice, pilasters, and dado,

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or it may be arched; and in either case the architectural members are but unequal borders. All this applies, it need scarcely be said, not only to an architectural picture frame, but to architecture itself, and to whatever may be framed.

Something like a new departure occurs when the border, so to speak, *invades* the field or centre of the panel, as it very often does in French Renaissance work, sometimes to such an extent that little or no further decoration of the field is necessary. There is an indication of such trespass in Plate 8, where the "swag" and corner ornaments, which belong to the border, cut deliberately across the face of the panel. In some of the interlacing strap work of the Henri II. period (the French equivalent to our Elizabethan ornament), you cannot always clearly tell where the border begins and ends, or even whether a border was intended at all. It looks sometimes as if the designer had started with the notion of a border, but had allowed it so to encroach upon the field, or the field upon it, that in the end it is not at all clearly recognisable as such. An example of the kind occurs in Plate 9. You may

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Plate 9

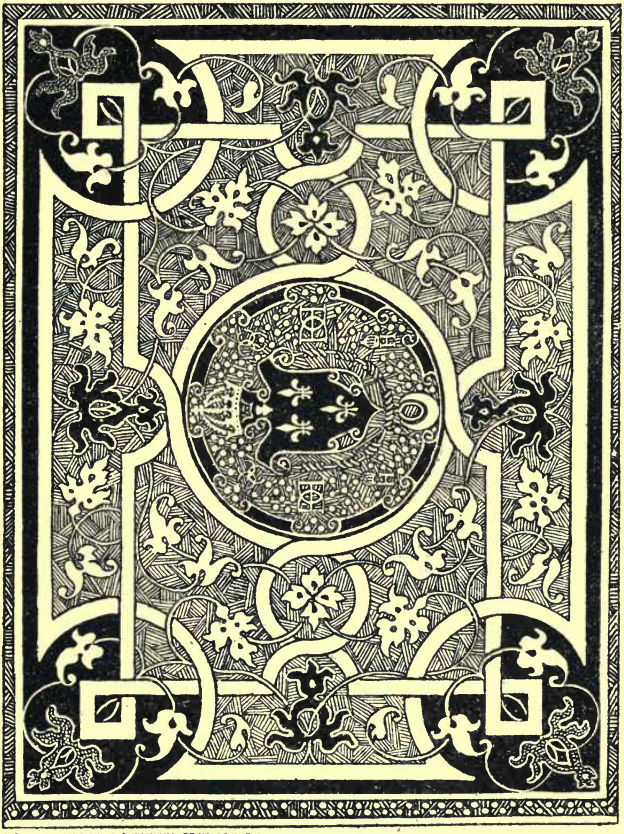

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Plate 10.

"Photo-Tint" by James Akerman

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Plate 11.

"PHOTO-TINT," by James Akerman

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see the idea of a border here; but you cannot be quite so certain that the designer intended it.

Nearly allied to this is another variety of border, also devised so as to be quite inseparable from the filling; in which, in fact, frame and filling are so ingeniously mixed up that but for the emphasis of colour, the effect would be confused. There is an instance of this in Plate 10, where the scroll, whilst to some extent acknowledging the boundary line, invades, and indeed entirely occupies, the border. In such a case there is at all events no fear of the exceeding preciseness which is one of the dangers to beware of in border design.

It is interesting to notice the difference between the last-mentioned method and the practice of the Japanese, who will, in the most unhesitating manner, allow the panel pattern, whatever it may be, to break over the margin or border, as the impulse may prompt. It is a proceeding which may or may not result in confusion, according to the relative strength of the border and the pattern that cuts across it. In Plate 11 the border pattern is so subdued that the more important floral growth is very

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well able to take care of itself. In the case of a panel in which the enrichment only partially occupies the ground, it is often advisable to introduce some sort of subsidiary border, losing itself behind such more prominent enrichment.

One appreciates the freak of the Japanese as a relief from the monotony of absolutely formal disposition; but it is not a thing to indulge in very freely. It is refreshing to see that a man is not afraid of infringing occasionally upon the margin—on sufficient grounds; but the licence needs always to be justified by some excuse other than the artist's impatience of order. We have to be on our guard against a certain spirit of anarchy which appears to have taken possession of so many a modern artist. There is a class (one cannot call it properly a school) which will repudiate, not only all the laws of art, but the need of all law whatsoever. Urgent need there may be of reform in our ideas of art, perhaps even of revolution; but sobriety recognises in the artistic anarchist only the enemy of art.

There is no peculiar sanctity implied in a margin, that it should be held inviolate; but

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Plate 12

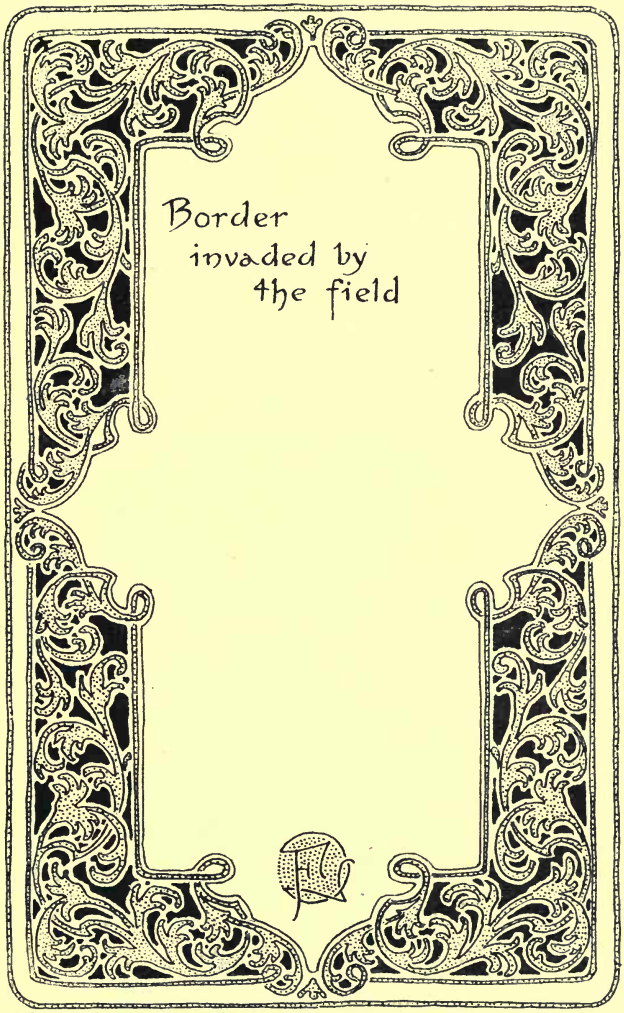

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Plate 13.

"PHOTO-TINT," by James Akerman.

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the very idea of ornament implies order. And the artist cannot afford to be forgetful of order, even when he allows his border to overgrow the field, or his filling pattern to extend beyond the frame.

There was a fashion in vogue in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries — borrowed probably from the East — according to which the border is invaded rather by the field or ground than by the pattern on it; where the field, in fact, seems to eat into the border. It is usually, as you may observe in Plate 12, rather a symmetrical mouthful that it takes.

A border may be lost in a sort of confusion with the panel it began by pretending to enclose. No one ever managed that more cleverly than Boulle, a panel of whose design is given in Plate 13. There is considerable ingenuity in the way in which the pattern is made to appear alternately light on dark and dark on light, without actually confining such alternation within strict border lines, as on Plate 16. But a border remains a border, however undefined. Boundaries may be understood rather than expressed. Yet that makes no difference as to the lines upon which a design is constructed. You may discard the

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very idea of formality; you may determine that you will have none of it; that you will merely sketch upon your page such and such marginal forms, natural or ornamental; but if you dispose them in anything like an orderly manner, you arrive at something which comes as clearly under the category of border treatment as though it had been enclosed by hard and fast boundary lines. The winged heads and boys and ribands on Plate 14 form, after all, a border.

Every margin or marginal line is in its degree a border. The white margin of this printed page borders the type. In Indian and other Oriental work you often see the ornamental details so closely packed as to define the border-shape even without actual boundary lines. And the Germans of the sixteenth century (Jost Amman, for example) sometimes did with very different details just the same thing. The looser borders of the looser times of Louis XIV., XV., XVI., do everything they can to hide the lines of their construction; but you may take it as a sign of artistic demoralisation to be afraid of a straight line. Hogarth, who preached "the line of beauty," was not exactly an apostle of the beautiful.

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Plate 15.

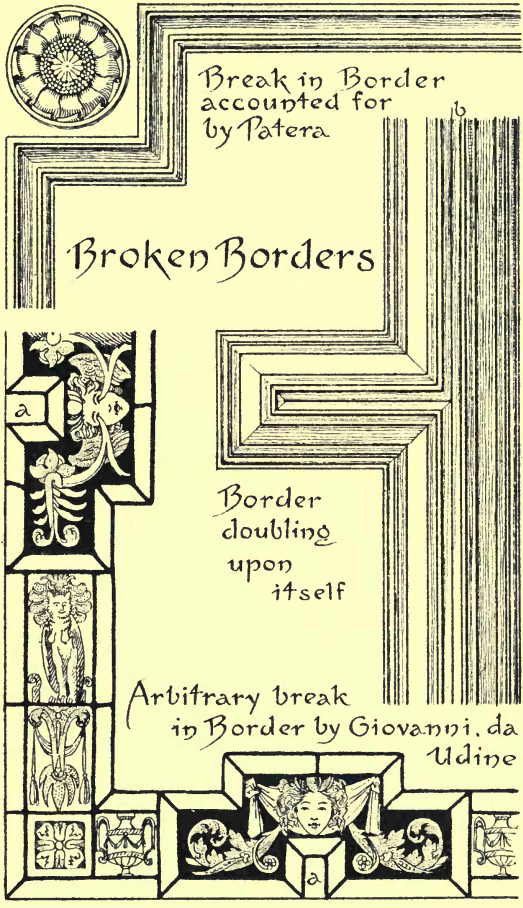

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Plate 16.

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So great is the use of the border, that even they who least like formal lines are bound to adopt it; although they are perpetually rebelling against its formality, and doing their best to break it up, as in the case of the encroaching and interrupted borders already mentioned.

The very *naïvest* way of getting over the difficulty—it is a difficulty, there is no denying—is by, so to speak, snipping a piece or two out of the panel, and carrying the border round the incisions, so as to get a more or less irregular central space instead of the four-square parallelogram.

In the Certosa near Florence, there are some windows by Giovanni da Udine (the border of one of them is illustrated on Plate 15), in which he has deliberately snipped pieces (*a*) out of the space to be filled, and left them as so many gaps in the design. We can forgive this kind of thing once in a way; but it stands very much in need of justification.

Where a gap has some meaning it is different. In the case where there is a square block or patera occupying the corner, as you sometimes see in seventeenth century

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wood-panelling (and on Plates 15 and 16), that seems to account for the break in the border. It is as though the border went out of its way in order to escape the patera.

Nor is there any objection to the doubling of the border round an imaginary line (*b* on Plate 15); by which means the same end of irregularity is arrived at without the brutality of da Udine's method. The Italians of the Cinque Cento resorted freely to the foregoing plans—in their schemes of ceiling decoration to wit; and with marvellously beautiful results. Perhaps, however, they were rather too ready,—certainly the artists of the later Renaissance were too ready—to adopt any device which would enable them to depart from the simple panel form. In not a few instances, the further they went from it the worse it fared with them.

A separate treatise might be written upon the construction of the border itself. It may be continuous or broken, and broken at all manner of intervals, and in all manner of ways. It may flow, or grow. It may be symmetrical or absolutely free. The outer or the inner edge may be accentuated, or both, or neither. It may spread outwards from

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a well-defined central feature or inwards from the margin, diffusing itself, and giving a less definite central shape.

But it is not so much the design of the border that we are considering at present as the place of the border in design—on which point enough for the present has been said.

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III.

Within the Border.

Though you abandon all idea of bordering, and elect to place, as you well may, some arbitrary shape within the parallelogram, the space round about that shape may indeed be considered as an irregular border to the same. If, for example, you plant in the centre of the space a medallion, and round that medallion design a cartouche, after the manner of Jost Amman in Plate 17, the cartouche and its accessories may be called the frame or border of the medallion; and, again, the ground beyond the edge of the ornament may be taken to be the margin or border to that. But it is going rather out of the way to look at Amman's design in that light.

In the example chosen for illustration we have shapes, fitted one to the other; but one might just as well have two or more independent and unconnected shapes. Nothing is easier than to take a simple field, and to spot

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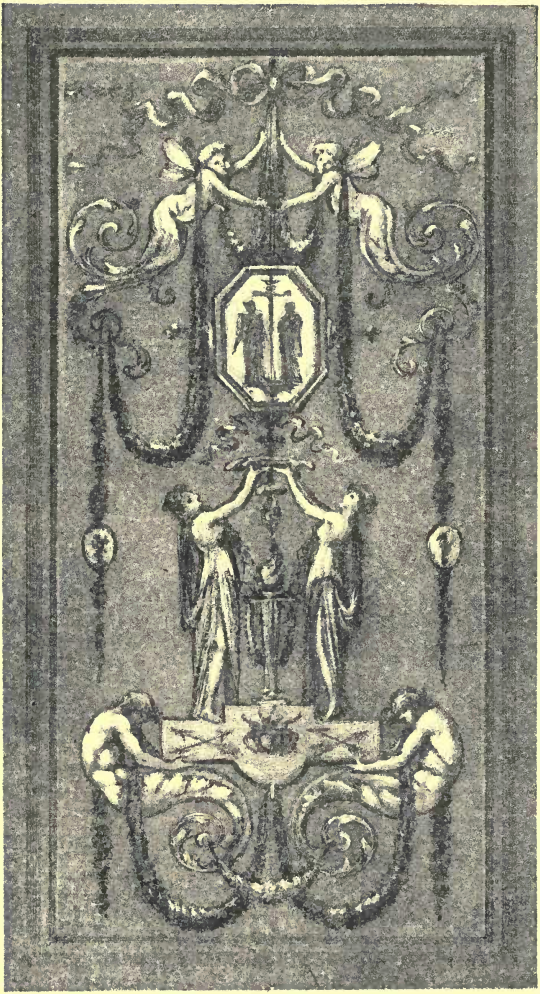
Plate 18



"PHOTO-TINT," by James Akerman.

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Plate 19.

O.F EGLL, PHOTO-LITHO, 8, FURNIVAL ST HOLBORN, E.C.

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about upon it any shapes you please. That is one way, not a very ornamental way, but one way, of occupying the space.

When you proceed to connect such shapes in any way, you bring in another principle of design—which, however, will be more conveniently approached from the other side, when we come (as we presently shall) to the discussion of the lines enclosing various shapes and subdivisions.

Abandoning all thought of border, or supposing a border already in existence, you may, as I said, plant any independent shape, medallion, shield, cartouche, tablet, what you will, within it. This form may be left, as it were, floating in space, or it may be supported by ornament; which ornament may literally seem to hold it up; or, if you will, the ornament may appear to be suspended from it, as was most frequently the case with the festoons and garlands of the later Renaissance. Instances of such support and suspension are given in Plates 16, 17, 18. Finally, the ornament may be unconnected with the central shape, and comparatively independent of it, as a powdering or sprig-diaper would be.

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The central feature need not, of course, include a frame of any kind; it may be a figure, a spray of flowers or ornament, a vignette, a spot, a spray—as free as painter's heart could wish. Or, just as in the case of the closely-packed border whose shape was marked without the aid of boundary lines, so any central sprig of ornament or foliage may be so densely massed within a square, circle, quatrefoil, or other imaginary form, as to assume a quite regular outline. Such grouping of the ornament is shown very plainly in Plate 19, where the circular shape is emphatically pronounced without the aid of any enclosing line. You see the same thing very commonly in Indian art.

A number of sprays, or other features, free or formal, group themselves into a sort of diaper. Such diaper should naturally have some reference to the space it fills, or it will appear less than trivial. The interlacings on Plate 5 form panels, Plates 20 and 35 are only bits of diaper work. Whether the component units of such a decoration be all alike, or of various design, is a question independent of the lines of their distribution. The variety in Plate 21 is at all events amusing. Had

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Plate 20.

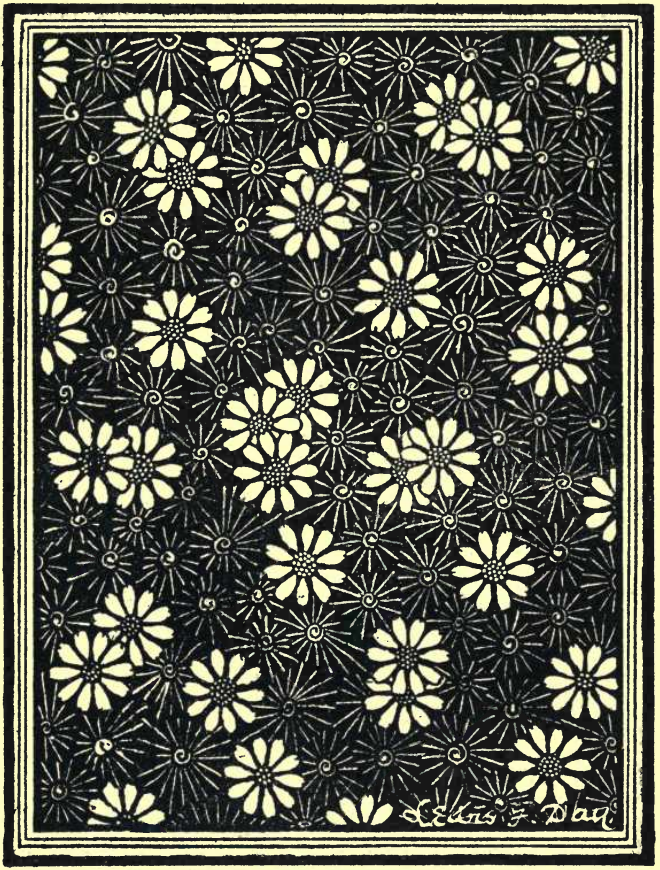

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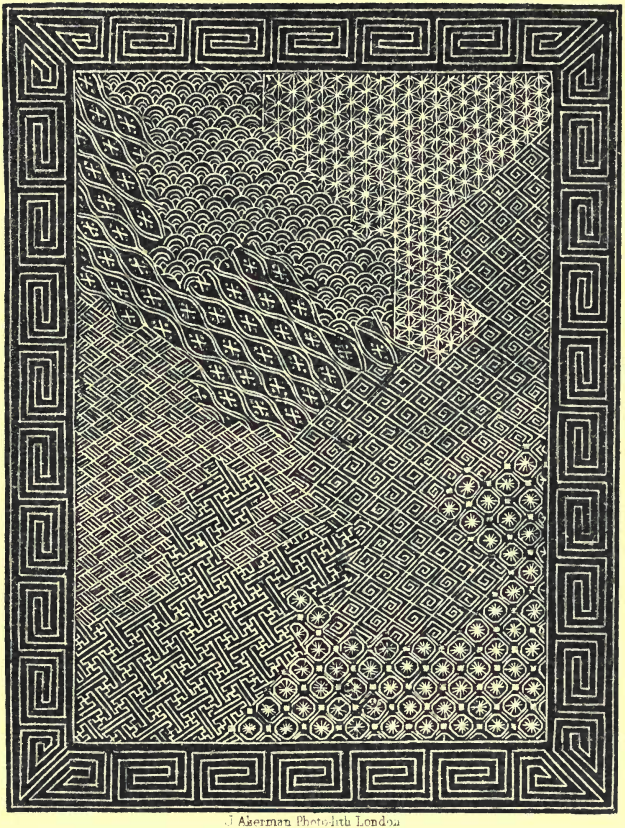
Plate 21.



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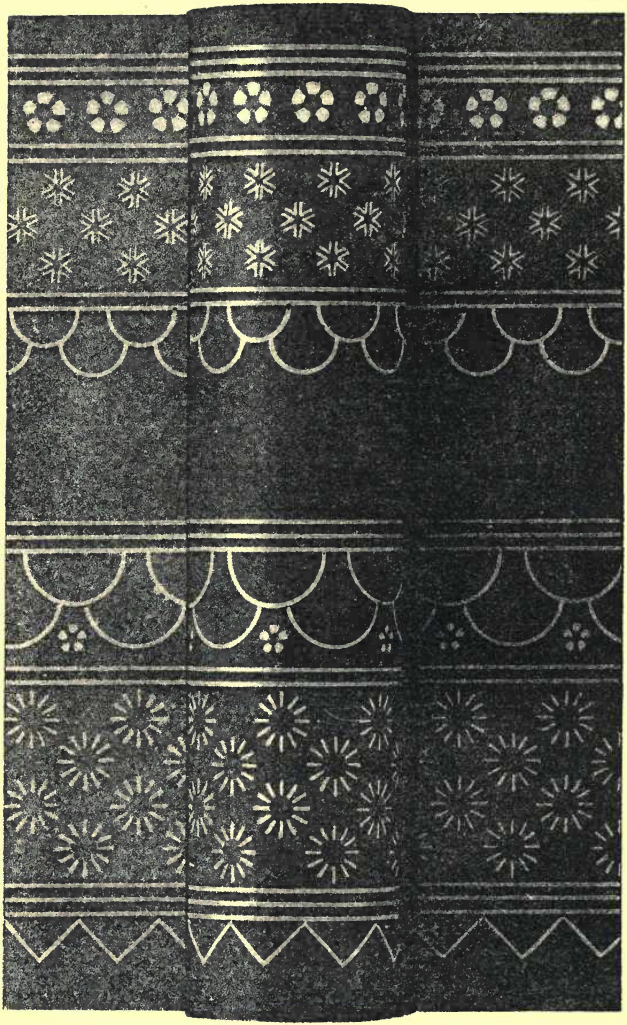

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there been evidence of order within this disorder, of any plan on which the various diapers were put together, one would have welcomed it as a relief from obvious geometry. The merely accidental patchwork is perhaps condonable once in a way. It is instanced here as a freak of Japanese perversity, not as a model of design. But it has its charm: one does not readily grasp all that is in it: there is always something to find out; which is just what there would not be in a simple and orderly geometric pattern of the European type.

A mere series of bands or stripes across the field (vertical, horizontal, diagonal, waved, or in whatever direction), is an obviously simple way of getting over the ground, about which not much further need be said. As the filling of a panel, such a treatment as that shown on Plate 22 is not very adequate. Rightly employed it forms, however, a very fit and proper method of decoration: for the slight enrichment of a vase or cylinder nothing could well be more apropos than this banded scheme of ornament.

Such filling as a scroll or anything of the kind may be quite freely drawn, as on Plates

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11 and 25, or disposed symmetrically in relation to an imaginary central line or spinal cord, as in Plates 10, 13, 16, &c.; or it may radiate from the centre, as it naturally would in a ceiling, pavement, carpet, or other object demanding an all-round treatment. Something like radiation of the design occurs in Plates 3 and 9.

The scroll work, or what not, may equally proceed from two ends of the panel, as in Plate 23, or from the sides, or from both sides and ends, either symmetrically or at irregular intervals; or it may spring from the corner or corners, as in Plate 24.

The treatment from the corners is, again, adapted to, and often adopted in, ceiling decoration. In principle it is very right indeed; but in practice it is not invariably all that decorator could desire. The "line and corner" tune, as it may be called, has been harped upon until one is pretty well sick of it, even when it is played in time—which is not always the case.

A corner-wise treatment is seen to advantage when it has been suggested by use, as in the metal garniture of old book-bindings, and in the clamps of coffers such as German

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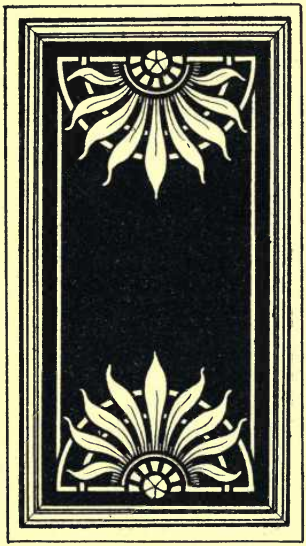

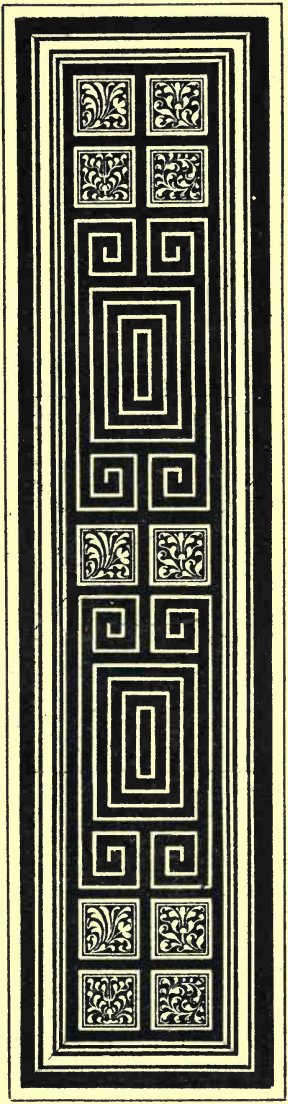

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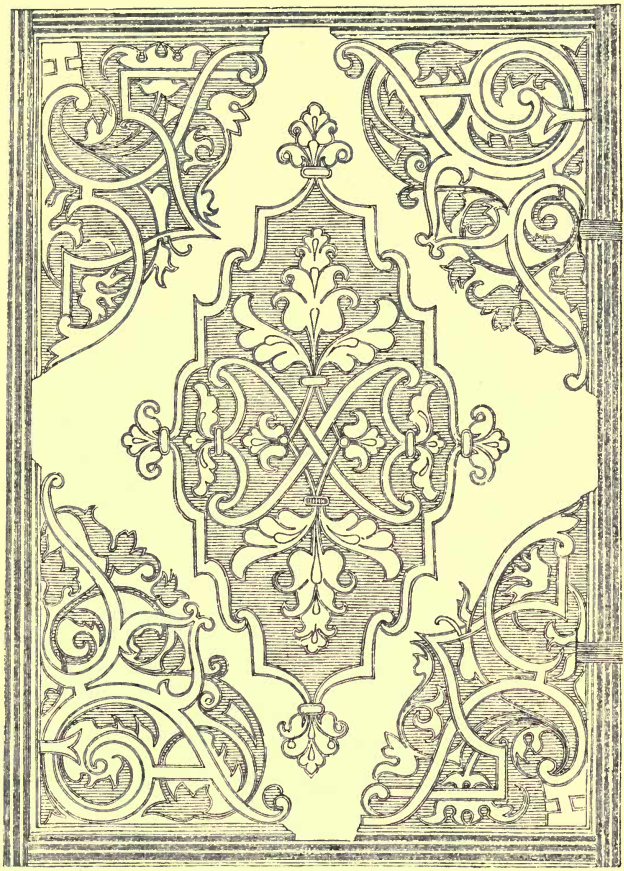
Plate 24.



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smiths of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries elaborated with workmanlike pride. In the tooled binding of the Henri II. period, given on Plate 9, the corner is very carefully taken into consideration, such consideration being very possibly a survival from the times when the corners were habitually protected by metal-work. There is an instance of this on Plate 40. You see also in book covers of all times instances of a treatment where the design is manifestly "to be continued in our next," the side unseen being necessary to its symmetrical completeness.

Further examples of the same thing occur in the mediæval cabinet doors given in Plate 25.

The need of clasps, hinges, and so forth, no doubt gave the hint of such a manner, which, in spite of the one-sided forms it gives, is wholly satisfactory in effect. We do not sufficiently realise how readily the mind makes good what the eye does not see in design; assuming, that is to say, a certain workmanlike reasonableness in it. In Plate 26 (which is only one half of a cabinet) the design is in a very noticeable degree the outcome of the constructional idea. The

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artist relied greatly upon the locks and hinges for his effect.

It is worth while to compare the above-mentioned scheme, in which the symmetry is suggested rather than expressed, with the free and easy way in which the Japanese lacquer-worker will overrun the limits of a box top or cabinet front, and trail his ornament over all or any of its sides indiscriminately. The front of the box is not enough for the dragon on Plate 27. Yet you will observe that there is a certain consideration for ornamental propriety in the disposition, for example, of the creature's claws.

There also, the artist, in his very different fashion, chooses to consider the whole object his field, and not just the portion of it he sees before him. There is a certain logic in his licence, too—especially as it appears to be good manners in Japan minutely to examine your neighbour's nicknacks; but the more restrained manner of the mediæval workman is, in proportion to its restraint, the more to be preferred.

Where the design—scroll, foliage, or whatever it may be—bears no relation at all to the shape or space it occupies, like the diapers

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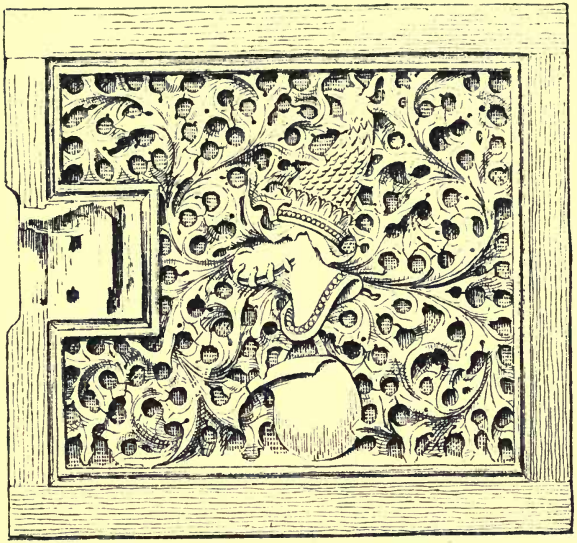
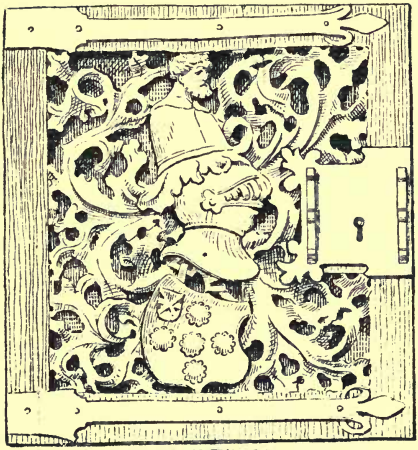
Plate 25.





DOORS of old German Cabinets with heraldic carving

Panels incomplete or one-sided

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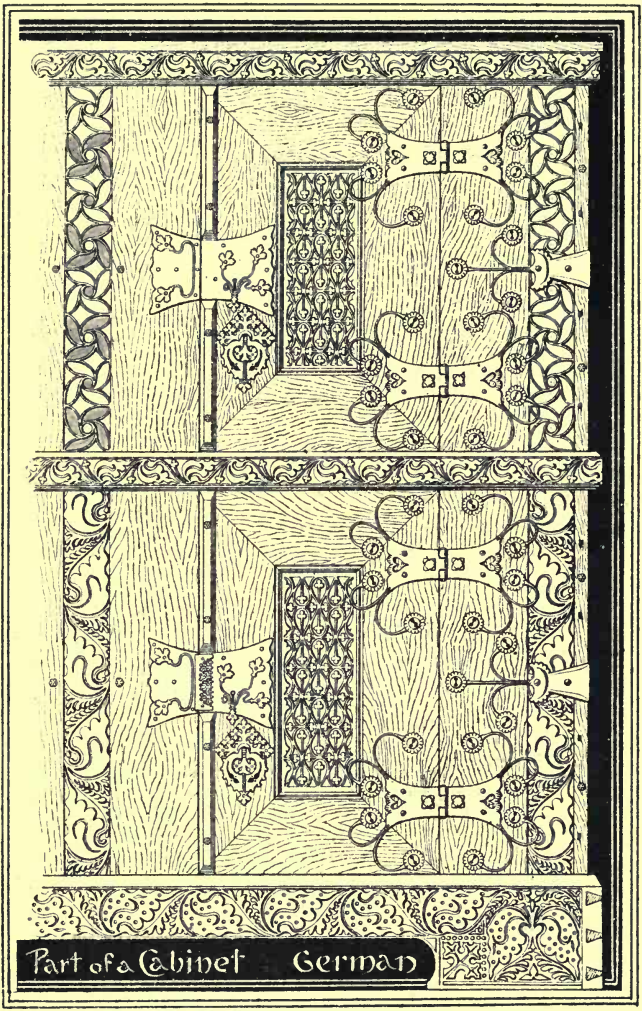

Part of a Cabinet German

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on Plates 20 and 35, it ceases to be surface design, and is merely a means of breaking the surface. It is only as a background that such hap-hazard distribution of forms has any meaning. But then a good deal of decorative design pretends to be no more than background.

A very satisfactory and effective result is sometimes reached where the artist starts, as it seems, with the idea of a diaper more or less geometrical, and, as he approaches the centre of the panel, gathers together the pattern, so to speak, into points of emphasis. You see this in the Roman pavement represented on Plate 3.

That is a case in which the design was unmistakably set out first of all in geometric divisions, certain of which divisions were afterwards grouped together to give point to the pattern. If you analyse any of the old Jacobean ceiling designs, or the Italian originals on which they are but variations, you will find that many of them may be resolved into very simple diapers, on a rather large scale, adapted to the space they fill, and emphasised here and there by figure subjects or other special filling of some of the more

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prominent geometric compartments. The panelling of the Jacobean cupboard door on Plate 28 resolves itself into just such a diaper, to which the figure in the central octagon gives point.

The difference between the method of design employed in Plate 3, and the plan adopted in the kind of design shown on Plate 9 is, that in this last the main shapes appear rather to have suggested the corresponding interlacements than the interlacements to have led up to them. But even in such a case it seems desirable that the artist should have in his mind from the beginning some kind of idea of geometric construction. The longer he can manage to keep that geometric notion in his mind, without putting it on paper, the more freely he can go to work. That same faculty of holding a design, so to speak, in solution in the mind, is most invaluable to the designer. A notion is so much more manageable in its fluid state. Once an idea is allowed to crystallise into definite form, it is no easy matter to modify it.

Should the space to be decorated be very considerable in extent, it is often necessary to cut it up into sections, otherwise than by

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Plate 27.

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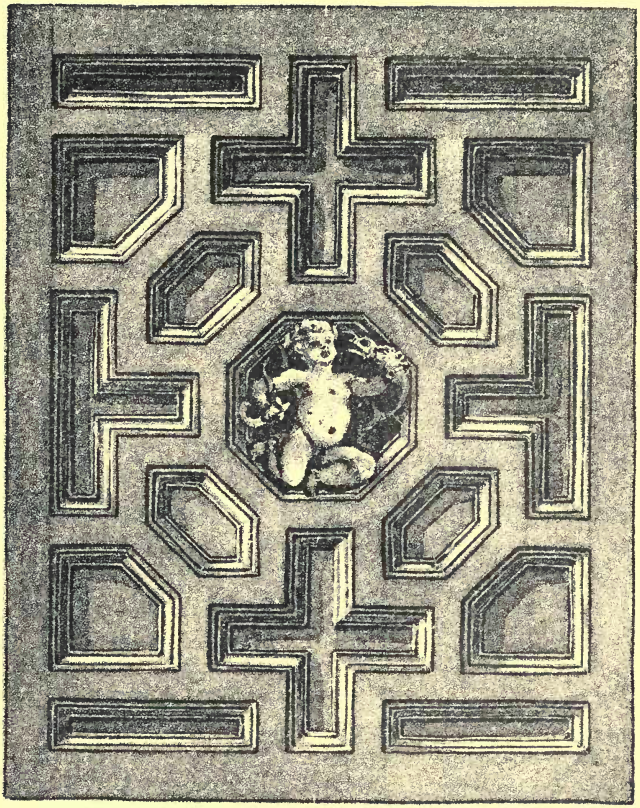
Plate 28.



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merely marking off a border. A wall, for example, is divided horizontally into cornice, frieze, wall space, dado, and so on, or vertically into arcading. Some such sub-divisional process may be adopted in the case of a smaller panel, with a view to modifying its proportions.

If the subdividing lines take both directions, the result is a scheme of panelling, such as was commonly adopted in the domestic wainscoting of some centuries ago.

Further, by the introduction of cross-lines at various angles, or of curved lines, we arrive, by a different road, at panelling of more complicate character (see once more Plate 28), and at something like the interlaced patterns to which reference has already been made.

It is clear that these various ways and means may be associated; and under the complex conditions of the times, they usually are more or less "highly mixed."

Thus one may, as I have said, begin with a border, and then treat the space within it in any of the ways already described; one may divide a wall horizontally into two, with a diaper or frieze at the top, and panelling below; or into three, with frieze, wall, and

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dado, either one of which may again be broken up. Thus the dado on Plate 29, itself one division of a scheme, is again subdivided into panels—and each of these panels is further broken up by a square of carving enclosed within an irregular margin of plain wood.

Again one may plant upon the field any independent feature, frame, shield, tablet, or such like, and then fill in the background without regard to it, as though a portion of the design were lost behind it. As many as three, or more, plans may be associated. For example, one may, as on Plate 30, stretch across a title-page a tablet, then introduce a border disappearing behind it, and the spaces enclosed between the border and the top and bottom of the tablet one may treat again either as one interrupted panel or as two independent parts. The fact, however, that they are both, as it were, on one plane in the design, seems to require that they should both be treated in much the same way.

The possibilities opened out by this association of various plans, are obvious.

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Plate 29.

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IV.

Some Alternatives in Design.

The use of the border is not, of course, confined to the outer edge of the main space to be filled. Every sub-section of the design may be provided with its own border, as you see in the case of panelling, where each separate panel has its own border of mouldings. Plate 3 shows two panels only of the design emphasised by independent borders within the outer frame. On Plates 6 and 31, the mouldings round the door panels are supplemented by additional painted borders.

A central feature, such as the medallion on Plate 32, may have its border or borders, interlacing with, intercepting, or intercepted by, the borders which mark the space or panel itself.

A surface once subdivided, as already described, two separate courses are open to the artist. The one is to accept each compartment as a separate panel, designing his

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ornament into it; in the manner shown on Plate 33. The other, which is no less reasonable, is to make his ornament continuous throughout; allowing it, that is to say, to cross the dividing lines or to interlace with them; more in the manner of Plate 9. The necessary thing is always to take the dividing lines duly into account even when crossing them.

Again, the two plans may be combined, certain prominent parts being reserved for individual treatment, and the subsidiary spaces only being linked together by the forms of the ornament, as though in Plate 33 the pattern had been allowed to meander through the lesser panels, the central diamond only being reserved for the grotesque head.

Which of these plans may be the better to adopt is a question of some nicety, not always easily to be decided. What rational question is? In proportion to the importance of the framing lines, it becomes dangerous to overstep them. Who ventures nothing runs no risk of failure; but neither will he achieve any great success in art. And then there is the charm of danger. Soldiers, sportsmen, and mountaineers are not the only class

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Plate 31.

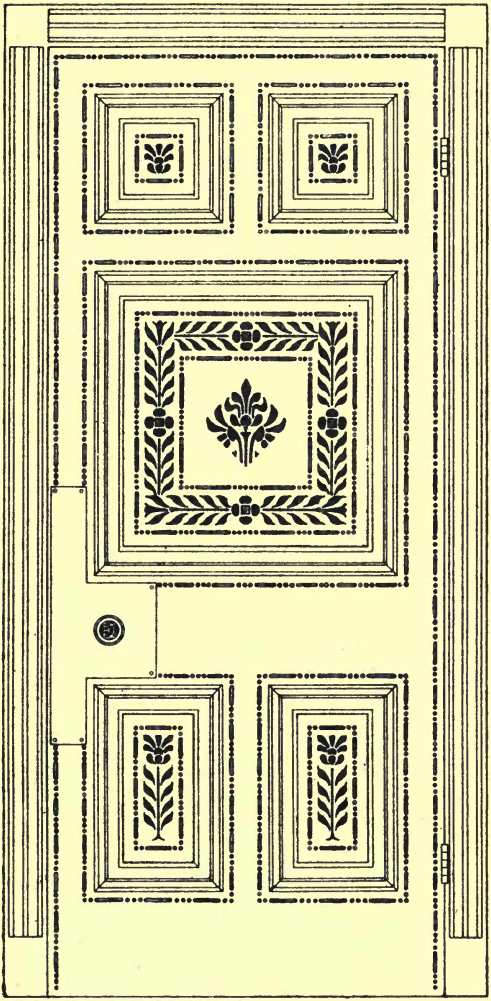

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Plate 33.

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of persons privileged to run a risk. It is a luxury we may all indulge in on occasion —were it not so, art would be no congenial pursuit for any one who is really alive. Only a man should look before he leaps into danger, weigh the odds before he wagers; "Erst wägen, dann wagen," is the pithy way Count Moltke's motto puts it.

When the artist starts from the beginning, and the scheme of design rests entirely in his own hands, it is not so difficult to determine just what is fit. The scheme develops itself. But in the more frequent case, in which the art of the ornamentist is only supplementary, and he has to work, as he usually has, upon lines already laid down for him, it is only where those lines are worth preserving that he is necessarily bound to preserve them— assuming, that is, that he can obliterate them. This is heterodox, but none the less true. If the lines existing are bad, and he can by his design withdraw attention from them to lines more reposeful to the eye, he is doing good work. Only he should do nothing but what he can make seem right. There must be no appearance of awkwardness, no suspicion of effort about it. It is a case in which success

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alone justifies the attack upon the situation. To fail is to lay yourself open to the charge of the unpardonable sin, the sin of disobedience to the conditions of design.

An actually hap-hazard or eccentric scheme of composition, such as a Japanese will sometimes affect, is hardly in contradiction to what I have laid down. When a Japanese artist cuts a panel quaintly into two, after the manner of Plate 34, and treats each part of it as seems good to his queer mind, he is only doing what the Pompeian decorator did when he cut off a portion of his wall space, and painted it as a dado; though he does it more energetically, not to say spasmodically, and with less appreciation of proportion.

So, again, when the said Japanese strews buds and blossoms about a box top, and breaks up the ground between with conventional, though very accidental, lines of crackle, as on Plate 35, or when he crams all manner of geometric diapers into a panel, as on Plate 21, he is merely doing in a more eccentric manner what the European artist does, with greater regard for symmetry, when he disposes his sprigs or what not on a geometric basis. If only he arrive at balance, which he

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Plate 34.

"Photo-Tint", by James Akerman.

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almost invariably does (so little is his instinct in this respect likely to err), there is no occasion to cry out against him. We, on our part, are perhaps too much disposed to design as though there were no possible distinction between symmetry and balance, between bulk and value—as though the little leaden weight did not balance the heaped-up pound of fruit or feathers in the scale.

Design apparently quite unrestrained, such as the men of the Renaissance habitually indulged in, proves very often, upon examination, to be constructed upon one or other of the systems I have described. Sometimes, indeed, the system of construction is very frankly indicated, though not precisely defined—the confession, that is to say, is full enough to ensure absolution for any offence there may be against strict order.

On Plate I there is blotted in a panel of ornament somewhat on the lines of Androuet du Cerceau, in which the central feature is an echo of the medallion treatment, whilst certain vertical and horizontal lines recall, however vaguely, the notion of a border. Such reminiscences of severely constructional divisions give additional charm, as it seems to me, to

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design otherwise fanciful, and even fantastic in character. It is as though a man said in his design, almost in so many words: I claim my freedom, but I have some lingering respect for law and order.

Except on the very minutest scale, the scope of subdivision possible with regard to a space, is not affected by the amount of ornament introduced, nor by its character. No matter whether it be human or animal figure that you employ, conventional or natural foliage, scroll or growth, interlacement, arabesque, or geometric pattern, the possibilities in the way of distribution are the same.

Naturally, however, certain lines of subdivision will be found to accord with certain kinds of treatment; and so we find that, as a matter of history, the Mohammedans adopted certain lines of composition, the Greeks other lines, and the Japanese quite others again, and so on.

Furthermore, the lines one would instinctively choose for different purposes would themselves be different. One would scarcely proceed to decorate a panel by merely crossing it with bands of ornament (see Plate 22),

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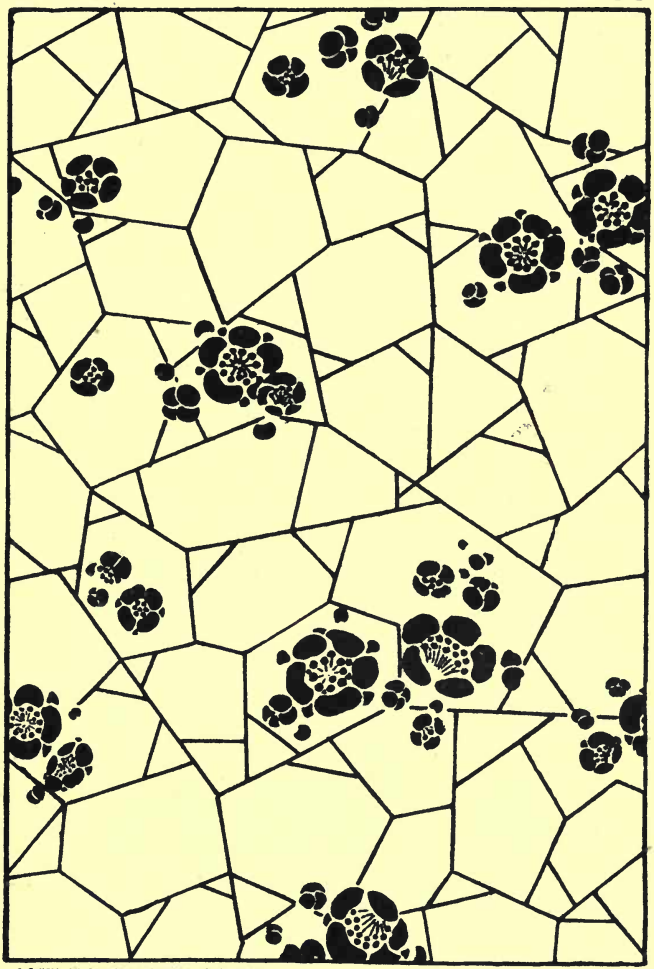
Plate 35.



G. F. KELL, PHOTO-LITHO, 6, FURNIVAL ST HOLBORN, E.C.

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except perhaps in the case of some long strip of a panel which it was absolutely necessary to shorten. There is a case in point given on Plate 36, where the disproportionate, though constructionally very proper, length of the panels of a roof is mitigated by the band-wise arrangement of the stencilled ornament.

A similar system was found by the Greeks to be the most satisfactory way of dealing both with vases and draperies. Their pet idea of decorating a full skirt seems to have been by means of so many parallel patterns. You have only to refer to the terra-cottas at the British Museum to see both of these uses illustrated, often in a single vase.

What one would do, then, is not the same thing as what might be done. The possible ways of distribution are never all of them alike expedient. There must, for example, necessarily be some correspondence between detail and its distribution.

For all that, there is no cut and dried rule as to the association of this kind of detail with that kind of distribution, or *vice versâ*. It does not even follow that the description of detail usually found in connection with a certain order of composition is the only detail

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appropriate to it. The happy connection of the one with the other is evidence only of their conformity, not at all of the incongruity of other combinations. It is just possible to fry without bread-crumbs. Is it not chiefly laziness (where it is not a suspicion of our own incompetence) which tempts us to adopt bodily what has already been found to succeed? There are so many people in the world to whom it comes easier to take what there is than to give something of their own.

A design is in harmony, not when it is strictly according to Greek or Gothic precedent, but when the parts all fit.

Suppose, for instance, the lines in a composition lead up to some prominent feature, that feature must be of sufficient interest to justify the attention it attracts. There are positions so prominent they almost demand figure design properly to occupy them.

Such central features as those in Plates 1, 17, and 32 are bound in consistency to be of more importance than their surroundings. I don't mean to say that an heraldic shield like that on Plate 17 is essentially of profoundest interest; but in the eyes of its owner at least it is worthy of all prominence.

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Plate 36.

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In like manner also, if it is proposed to introduce the figure, or anything of that importance, it is only natural to provide for it in your scheme, whether in the shape of medallion, frame, niche, or what not. The gem of your design should have a setting worthy of it.

Any feature, such as a tablet, medallion, label, cartouche, shield, and so on, introduced into a composition, should bear relation not only to its surroundings, but to what it is to enclose. This is a serious consideration very often neglected. It is no uncommon thing to see a shield introduced only to bear an inscription, a circular medallion to frame a picture which demands a rectangular outline, and all manner of queerly proportioned shapes, which by their very position call for decoration, whilst, at the same time, it is almost impossible to fill them satisfactorily.

Upon the same principle of fitness, a predetermination to adopt natural forms of foliage would, artistically speaking, necessitate the choice of a not too rigid skeleton for it. Detail designed on a large scale would call for equal breadth and simplicity in the setting out.

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So with regard to the allotment of ornament—once the lines determined, the artist must scheme his ornament accordingly. Whether he elect to ornament every portion of the surface, as the Orientals and the artists of the Early Renaissance often do, or certain selected parts only, like the Greeks, whether he chose to decorate many parts or few, and which parts, and how—that is his affair. His taste must be his guide in that; and unless he have some taste he had better not attempt to design. This may sound like discouragement; but it is only kindness to the beginner easily capable of discouragement to make him aware at once of the difficulties in his way. The lukewarm may as well be warned off. Ornament is not one of those easy things a man may take up for a livelihood, pending fame as a painter. Success in ornament implies devotion to it.

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V.

On the Filling of the Circle and other Shapes.

The various lines on which ornament may be distributed over a simple panel or parallelogram having been so far discussed, it remains now to show how the same principles apply to the covering of all manner of shapes.

Evidently it makes little difference at all, and in principle none whatever, whether it is four sides of a figure we have to deal with, or three, or five, or how many. In either case you proceed in the same way; you work from the centre or from the sides, as best may suit; you divide your space into regular or irregular compartments, on the systems already explained; you overlay one feature with another, or interweave this with that; you interrupt a border, or encroach upon a field, according to the circumstances of the case; and so on, much as though it were a square shape you were dealing with.

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In the case of anything like an awkward shape, you have even an opportunity of correcting it, by introducing into it some prominent figure of more regular outline, which, if you insist upon it, will occupy attention, whilst the irregular surrounding space will go only for margin or border—just as in the case of the regular panel you had the option of discounting its severity by means of any irregular feature it seemed good to you to insert.

The management of the circular shape, and of the irregular forms of vases, seems to present a more serious difficulty; but it is more apparent than real.

The simple treatment of a vase is (1) according to its elevation, as may be seen in Vase 1, Plate 37, or in any striped Venetian glass, or (2) according to its plan, as exemplified in Vases 2, 3, 4, or in the rude earthenware of every period. The glass-blower falls, in fact, as naturally into the one scheme of lines as the thrower or turner into the other. ("The Application of Ornament," Plate 8).

A third way is to cross the shape diagonally, which gives the appearance of twisting

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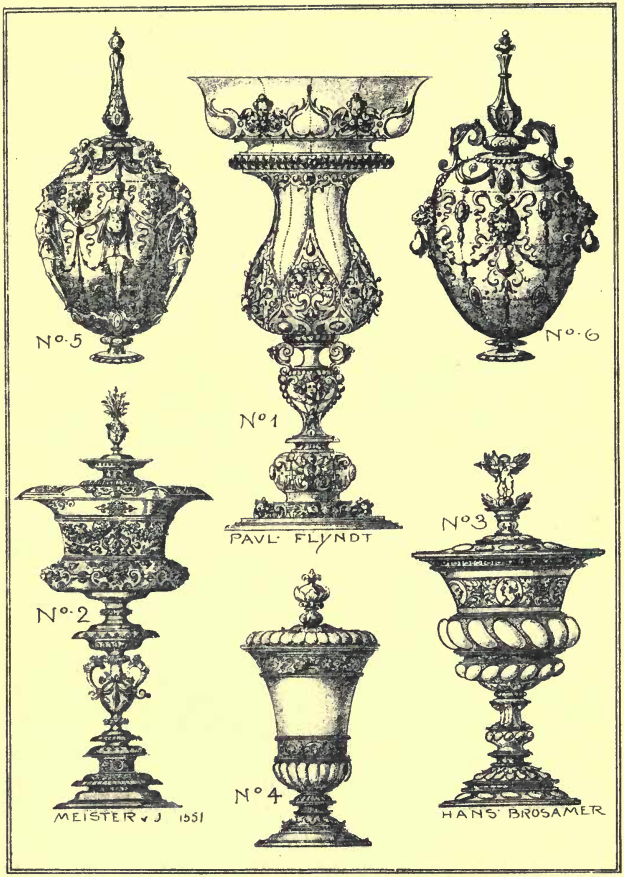
Plate 37.



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to be seen in the bowl of vase, 3 a device common enough in old silversmiths' work.

Two or more of these systems may be associated; and they often are; as in so many a German tankard of the fifteenth or sixteenth century, where the bulbous bowl is beaten out into the semblance of a melon, and the neck and foot take the lines of the lathe. In Vases 5 and 6 it is very noticeable how the ornament is constructed on two series of cross lines, the one series according to their plan, the other according to their elevation.

Now the decoration of a vase lengthwise, according to its elevation, corresponds to the striping of a panel with vertical lines; the decoration bandwise, according to plan, corresponds to the striping of a panel with horizontal lines; and the twisted treatment corresponds to a series of diagonal lines crossing a panel.

The way in which medallions, panels, and other shapes may be incorporated with the design of a vase is not different from that already set forth. There is, however, this difficulty, that any marked independent shape is likely to interfere with the form of the vase, or the form of the vase to distort it, which is

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the way with the landscape and picture medallions so persistently misapplied to Sèvres and Dresden china. Not that it is impossible to introduce such features with good effect; only it needs to be done with judgment, which of all things is most rare. And, as it happens, the difficulty has been more often attacked with valour than with that discretion which is reputed to be its better part.

What is said with reference to the vase shape applies equally to balusters, columns, and cylindrical shapes generally.

When we come to the circular shape, as of coins, plates, medallions and so on, its decoration involves new forms rather than new principles.

The circle is most naturally divided either into rays or into rings. In the one case the radiating lines may be said to answer to the division of a rectangular space by vertical lines; in the other the rings would answer to the horizontal lines dividing a panel. A reference to Plate 38 will make this more clear.

Imagine a series of upright lines (A) to represent the folding of a sheet of paper. You have only to gather the folds together at one end, after the manner of a fan (B), and you

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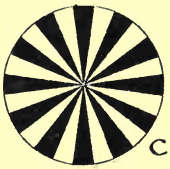
A

B

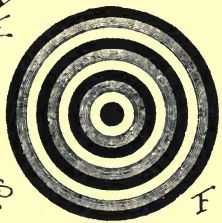

C

Upright & Radiating Divisions

D

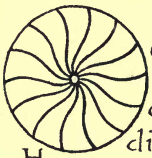
E

Horizontal Lines & Rings

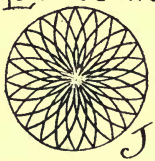

F

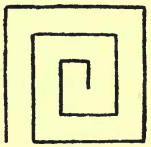
G

Crossing Lines equivalent to Lattice-work


H

equivalent to diagonal divisions.


J


K

L

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have the system of radiation. Repeat the fan shapes side by side, and you arrive at a circle divided into rays (C).

Again, in the case of a series of horizontal bands (D), you have only to suppose them elastic enough to be bent, and you have a series of concentric arcs (E), so many slices, so to speak, out of a circle decorated ring-wise (F). The identical target-like result may be arrived at by the continuation of a series of borders round the circle, one within the other. That is only another way of reaching the same point in design. As in the case of pattern planning ("Anatomy of Pattern," pages 19 and 22), one comes by various lines of thought to the same conclusion.

The crossing of the two schemes (G) is much the same thing as a square lattice of cross lines in a rectangular panel. The sub-division of the circular space by lines of more flowing character (H) would correspond to the division of the panel by diagonal lines. And if those lines were crossed (J), it would be analogous to the division of the square by cross lines into diamonds.

The spiral line, as applied to the decoration of the circle (K), is equivalent to the fret or key

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pattern as applied to the square (L). These analogies, I think, are plain enough. They were suggested to me by Mr. Henri Mayeux's "La Composition décorative" (A. Quantin, Paris), to which the student may refer for more ample illustration of the subject.

All manner of independent shapes may be introduced into the decoration of the circle, as into that of the panel. One may plant a shield in the centre, and surround it with a border, as in the central disc on Plate 39: one may associate any arbitrary form with ringed or radiating lines. But should any such shape form an important feature in the design, the situation is not so free from danger. The limit is soon reached, that is to say, within which lines or forms at once independent and emphatic may judiciously be introduced into a circular design. Anything which counteracts the shape of the space you have to fill needs to be accounted for. The two rosettes at the top of Plate 39 are designed on the safe lines of radiation; in the two at the bottom of the plate the design is based in the one case on a vertical dividing line, in the other on a horizontal.

The difficulty in dealing with forms con-

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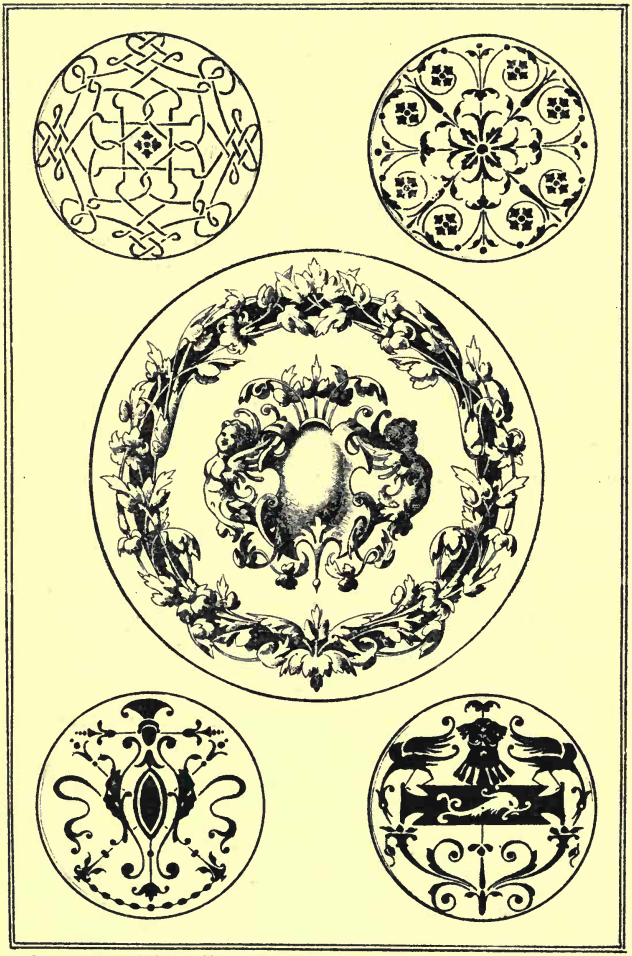
Plate 39.



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tradictory one to another is, that you are apt to leave interspaces of irregular shape, which are not easily manageable; as for instance, in the inevitable spandril which occurs so frequently in architecture. If a spandril happen to be very large you can insert into it a more symmetrical shape, which will hold its own; and if it be insignificantly small, you may ignore it. You may (where it is of importance enough to be accepted as an individual panel) treat it as such, with figures, scrolls, and so on. You may simply cover it with an unimportant pattern in the nature of a diaper, or leave it blank. These are the extremes: the happy mean in spandril decoration is not easy to find.

The spandril may be taken as typical of all the many awkward shapes which come of the intersection of curved lines by straight. Ornamental design would be a very much easier thing if we had only to consider the lines of the ornament, without any regard to the interspaces.

From the circle to the rosette, or cusped circle, is so short a step, that the treatment of such shapes goes almost without further saying. The cusps seem almost to call for

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acknowledgment by lines radiating towards them. Indeed, if you simply carry a series of borders, one within the other, round the cusps, the points where they meet will give of themselves radiating lines; just as in the case of the vandyke or zigzag ("Anatomy of Pattern," p. 9) it was shown that the recurring points gave vertical cross lines.

The pentagon, hexagon, and other equal-sided polygonal figures may be considered as broken circles.

The triangle offers no new difficulty: it is merely a case of three sides to deal with instead of four.

A branched form may be resolved into its elements. The Greek cross, for example, may be regarded as an assemblage of five squares; the Latin cross as a group of as many as you please, according to the length of its arms, or as four parallelograms arranged round a square.

An altogether exceptional space will be pretty sure to indicate of itself the exceptional lines on which it can best be decorated; and a capricious one may well be left to the caprice of the artist.

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VI.

Order and Accident.

Entirely apart from the question of the skeleton of a design, is the consideration as to whether it shall be looked at primarily from the point of view of line or of mass.

In any satisfactorily completed scheme, lines and masses must alike have been taken into account; but the artist must begin with one or the other; and the result will probably be influenced by the one or other consideration which was uppermost in his mind. Which of the two it may happen to be, is more often a matter of temperament than of choice with him.

The primary consideration, whether of line or mass, will always lead the designer, though perhaps unconsciously, to adopt a plan accordingly. That is to say, the preference for mass will lead him to attack his panel resolutely, planting shapes upon it, which it will be his business afterwards to connect by means of

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the subsidiary lines needful to the completion of the scheme. On the other hand, a greater partiality for line will induce him to have recourse to a more orderly procedure; will, perhaps, even suggest a geometric groundwork, which, however far he may depart from the first lines, will materially help him in securing the object he has most at heart.

If you start with certain arbitrary and irregular forms, arbitrarily and irregularly disposed, so many patches, as one may say, on the panel, it is clearly not such a very easy matter to connect them by any systematic lines of ornament. If, on the contrary, you begin with a system of orderly lines, these must necessarily determine in some measure the shape and distribution of any more prominent features you may thereafter introduce into the scheme.

For my own part (whilst I disbelieve entirely in arriving at anything more than flat mediocrity by the adoption of set rules of proportion), I feel rather strongly that there should be by rights a strict relation between the parts of a design, however little it may be obvious. If, for example, there is a space to fill between border and central medallion

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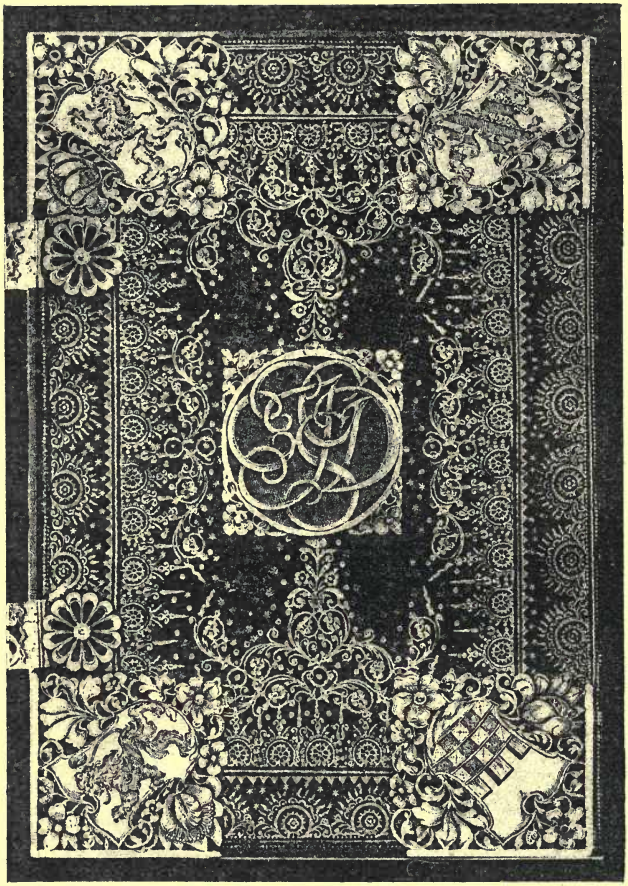
Plate 40.



"PHOTO-TINT," by James Akerman.

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a diaper may be enough; but the diaper should be designed into its space. And even if part of a design be permitted to disappear, as it were, behind this feature or that, it should be so schemed that no very material form is mutilated in the process. Where an interruption occurs in a border the pattern should be planned with a view to such interruption. Even though you deliberately adopt a diaper, say as background to a scroll, the character of that diaper should be determined by the scroll, notwithstanding that the lines of the one are meant to contradict the lines of the other. The cultivated artistic sense is by no means satisfied with the casual employment of *any* diaper.

Again, where one feature of the design is overlaid by another, as frequently happens in Early Gothic glass, the overlapping patterns should be designed to overlap—as they always were. The spaces between one series of medallions should suggest the outlines of the subordinate medallions between, which again should be shaped with a view to any proposed interruption. In the book cover on Plate 40 the tooled borders disappear as it were behind the silver clasps

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and corners; and one sees no harm in this, because the tooling is so distinctly subordinate to the silver mounting, indeed one may say designed to supplement and connect it. The careless overlaying of one pattern, or of one scheme, by another, is the merest make-shift for design.

The apparently "accidental" treatment, when it is at all successful, is not quite so much a matter of accident after all. You will find invariably, if you inquire into it, that there has been no disregard of the laws of composition, but only the omission of some accustomed ceremonial. To take what might seem a flagrant instance of the disregard of an obvious rule of art:—an artist like Boulle would sometimes boldly treat the doors of a cabinet as one panel, notwithstanding their actual separation by a pilaster between them. However wicked this may be in theory, his practice proved it to be not so unsatisfactory. And for this reason—that the upright intervening space was, as a matter of fact, very carefully taken into account in the design.

He only goes a step further than the obviously permissible treatment shown in the double panel on Plate 41, where the two one-

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Plate 41.

Symmetrical Panel treatment.

Unsymmetrical Panels jointly symmetrical

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sided panels are jointly symmetrical. Boule chose to make a constructive feature less emphatic than its position would have suggested to most of us it should be. But he did not really ignore it. Very far from it. Had he disregarded construction, the error would have been very perceptible. If he succeeded at all in satisfying the eye, it is because he did with great deliberation and judgment what might easily be mistaken by the inexperienced for an inconsiderate thing. Giants can afford to be daring.

It is when dangerous liberties are taken by the novice, without forethought and without discrimination, that they become offensive. Where there is no offence in the lapse from what we have been accustomed to think a wise rule, be sure it was designed, and designed with more than ordinary skill. It is only a master that can reconcile us to something which, until he did it, we did not think could properly be done. There is nothing careless or casual in the art of design—not even in the little art of ornament.

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